



Jason P. Casper

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Tonight, before I left for this meeting, I wanted to post a statement on Facebook. You might find that ironic, since it was a handful of Facebook posts that got me into this situation in the first place; but I wanted there to be a record of my words available after I spoke to you this evening.

So here goes:

I stepped forward to serve on this Board only after waiting to see if someone more qualified, someone whose leadership I would trust, would do so. When that didn't happen, I thought, "I'm a teacher, and since Kenny Rivera left that perspective has been absent." I've worked with students from the inner city, and that's key to many of the kinds of challenges Red Clay is facing. I believe that we solve problems and educate kids not when we engage in ideological crusades, but when we sit down and do the thoughtful, detailed planning and support for our teachers, administrators, staff AND parents in the hard, day-to-day work of implementing those ideas.

No child has ever earned better math grades as the result of a fiery speech at a School Board meeting, or a cleverly worded meme on Facebook, which I think we all forget from time to time.

I know that I'm guilty of that.

As a leader, whether as a potential School Board President, or just as a Board member, I have been, and should have been held to a higher standard. I'm a conservative Catholic who believes in 2nd Amendment rights, and my posts did not do anything positive for those identities or for my district.

I should have known better. I should have known that in today's world attempts at humor are always politically dangerous, and that I was setting a poor example for the kids I love.

So I am sorry for that, I apologize unequivocally, first and foremost to them. I don't believe people who say, "For those whom I might have offended," so I won't say that.

It was inappropriate, and it has cost my family more dearly than you can imagine.

Yet, at the same time, this incident has told me more about the problems that keep us from coming together for our kids than I have otherwise learned in the past two decades.

As I look out into the audience tonight, I see the faces of those who have come here to protest against me as well as the faces of those who've turned out to support me.

And, you know what?

I don't recognize most of you. I haven't seen you at the committees that meet to pick next year's elementary math textbooks, or at meetings brainstorming about how to better support our special needs population, or at public Board workshops. Even more to the point, the statistics—and just the fact that I'm sitting up here—tell me that the overwhelming majority of you do not turn out to vote in Red Clay School Board elections.

Yet people who have never met me, never spoken to me, and never stepped up to the plate here in the district feel empowered by my errors to condemn me as wanting to bring "racism, violence, and hate" into our schools. One person even posted half gleefully the rumor that I had been so struck down by their attacks that I visited the Emergency Room last week and died.

I tried reaching out to some of my most vocal critics. I wrote an extended response to one, laying out in full my thought processes, especially around the post I'd written about the student walk-out. She did not deign to reply, and after reading my words moved from calling for me not to run for President to inciting her followers to show up tonight to demand my resignation.

I saw public officials and want-to-be politicians jump on the bandwagon like sharks smelling blood in the water. I remember thinking that when I saw this happen last year to a very good man, and a very skilled teacher, with whom I share literally nothing in common in terms of political viewpoints, "Wow, now I know what a feeding frenzy looks like."

Well, now I know what a feeding frenzy feels like.

I'd love to know if those of you who were convinced that you would come here tonight to see a rabid, white-robed fanatic carrying an AK-47 are wondering just what happened. All you got was an old driver education teacher and former funeral professional, who still digs graves from time to time.

As for my supporters tonight, aside from thanking you, I'd like to ask two favors.

The first is that if you signed up to speak, please don't. Your presence, and the kind words you've offered to me and to my wife, Ami, over the past week have been a Godsend in a dark time, but tonight your presence is sufficient.

We don't need to ratchet up the war of words and prove—unfortunately not for the first time—that this Board is more divided than it should be, and that in today's rough world of politics good people of differing opinions find it more productive to trade insults than ideas.

The second thing I would ask you, from the Constitutional Republicans to Delaware Gun Rights, from Moms Demand Action to Sandy Hook Promise, is to remember that this district is not about your battles over the status of gun rights or free speech, but about the necessity of doing our very best for the children about to walk back into Warner, Heritage, Highlands, Linden Hill, Stanton, Richardson Park, Skyline, Dickinson, Cab, Conrad and all of our other schools.

So I'd ask you tonight, if you live in the district, to stop and find out how to sign up for a committee, or a working group, or your building's PTA instead of letting this be your single visit to the process.

I will be working with you, if you do that, because I'm not going anywhere.

I will not be resigning my position on this Board.

I considered it, I really did. Would staying make me into the target of prolonged controversy that materially interfered with my ability to advance education? Would the cost of being publicly called—for the first time in my life—a violent, racist hate monger be too high a price for my family to bear?

But then I recalled that the teaching of my faith is that we are all, necessarily, flawed servants, but that it is our calling to emphasize the service and not use the flaws as an excuse.

So I will still be here. I pledge that I will be addressing my own flaws while working as tirelessly as possible for the children and families we are called to serve.

If you are moved to speak against me tonight, I will listen. Your passion is important, and your comments may move us further toward the district's goals even when they are personally uncomfortable to me. More to the point, I believe in your right to speak and to criticize all public officials for any reason, and I will practice that belief.

In the next couple of weeks, we will have close to 17 THOUSAND students coming back to our schools, as well as hundreds of staff members from custodial staff and bus drivers, to teachers, counselors and administrators; all getting prepared for our Red Clay kids. We have a new superintendent that we need to support so that he can make 2019-2020 the best school year possible. We are ALL here for the kids.

Thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to speak my piece.

Now let's get back to work!